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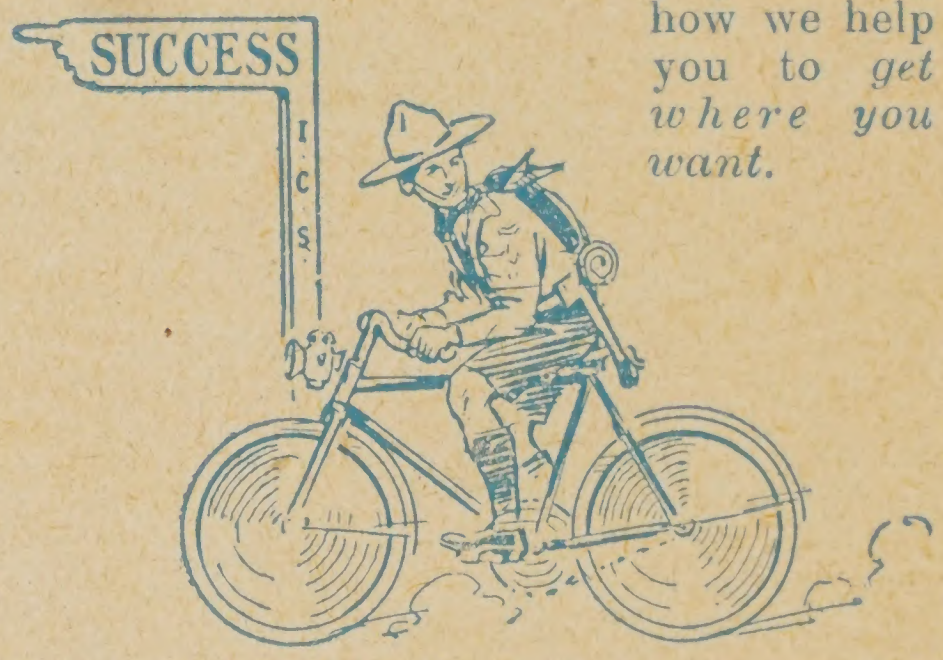

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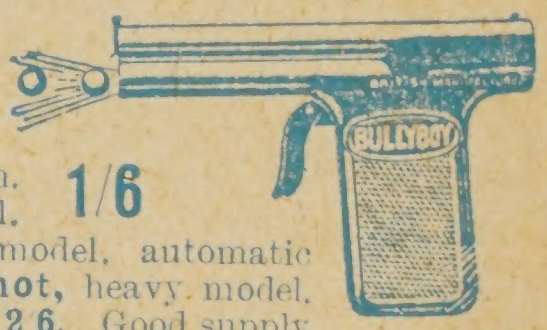

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CHAPTER 1.

Drugged aud Robbed

"It's awful, Carr. I don't seem to be able to realise it a bit. Why, I only heard from the poor old guv'nor last week, and was expecting him back for good next month."

"Didn't he ever say anything about having enemies at Sotillo?"

"Never a word. On the contrary, he always said what a good lot of fellows they were out there, though rough, of course."

"There must have been some reason for such an act—robbery or something. It was certainly not accidental."

Carr picked up the letter which lay on the table and re-read it to himself. It was a brief but kindly letter from a lawyer in Dodge City, informing Harvey Linnell that his father, Scott Linnell, had been shot by an unknown man, and begging Harvey to come out to the West so as to settle up affairs.

Scott Linnell had, it seemed, only just concluded the sale of some valuable property which he owned near Sotillo. The money, a large sum, had been deposited at the bank, and would be handed over to the dead man's heir after his identity had been satisfactorily established. There was no remark at all in the letter to indicate the cause of the tragedy.

"Perhaps this lawyer, Broadbent, had not had particulars," suggested Carr, as he laid the letter down. "He writes from Dodge City, which, if I remember right, is some distance from Sotillo."

"About ten miles off. I dare say that he thought the bare fact would be sufficiently distressing to me without going into details. I shall learn all that when I get there."

"When do you start?"

"To-morrow, if possible. But how in the world am I to establish my identity?"

"There's no difficulty about that. Take all letters with you that you have received from your father, and a few communications from well-known men here. You might send several on to-day with your photograph. They will reach there before you do, and you will have no difficulty whatever."

"Yes, that's a good idea. Send them to Broadbent, eh?"

"Certainly. He must have had dealings with your father, and would be the best man to employ. There is sure to be need of a lawyer's help, and he will put it all through for you without any bother. The rest of the papers which you will carry with you will settle the point without any question."

"I wish you were coming with me, Carr. This business has knocked me altogether. Couldn't you manage to do so?"

"I wish I could, old man, but it's out of the question. But I can get you your letters and two or three introductions to business people out there that may be of use to you. And if there is anything else I can help you with I shall be only too glad. Come and dine with me to-night, and we'll have another talk."

As the door closed upon his friend Harvey Linnell sank back into a chair, overcome by the fearful loss he had sustained. But as he thought of that cruel deed which had robbed him of the best of fathers he vowed that he would never rest until he had tracked

down the doer of the deed and brought him to justice. He spent the rest of the day in preparations for his journey, dispatched his credentials and photograph to John Broadbent, and dined with Carr and his people in the evening, as arranged.

An unforseen delay occurred the next day, and it was not until the fourth morning after he received the intimation of his father's death that Harvey found himself seated in a train bound Westward.

Travelling in those days was a good deal slower than it is now. Two breakdowns on the road and a long delay in making connections at St. Louis made the journey more tedious than ever, and the young man began to think that he would never reach his destination. But at last Winfield was reached, and he left the train to take his place in the coach which was to carry him to Dodge City.

There were six other passengers besides himself, who seemed quite prepared to make the journey of nearly a hundred and fifty miles pass as pleasantly as possible. Harvey was, however, in no mood to enter into their fun, and after several attempts to draw him out the others gave it up, voting him a dull dog.

That night they reached Medicine Lodge, where four of the passengers stepped off for the night, preferring the comforts of a bed to sleeping on the coach. Harvey decided to go on, grudging every minute of delay, and, wrapping himself in his coat, prepared to pass the night as best he could.

It was chilly in the extreme. A feeling of the utmost depression weighed on the youngster's mind like lead. He could not shake off a presentiment of evil and the certainty that he was running into danger.

He tried to pull himself together, talking with the driver and studying the wild scenery, looking wilder still in the cold light of the brilliant moon. But it was no good, until at last, overcome by weariness of mind and body, he fell into a troubled sleep.

He was awakened by the sudden stoppage of the coach. They had pulled up at another hostelry for a change of horses, and Harvey, following the example of the others, jumped down to stretch his legs and get a little refreshment.

Several men were standing near the bar as he approached, and made way for him. He ordered his "refresher," when the nearest man turned to him.

"Ain't your name Linnell?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes," answered Harvey, not a little surprised that anyone should know him in this out-of-the world place.

"Shoo!" ejaculated the other. "I'm glad I met you. I thought mebbe you'd decide to stay around at Medicine Lodge an' come along in the morning. We've bin lookin' out to see you for the last couple of days. Mr. Broadbent began to think that somethin' had happened to you, an' sent me along to make inquiries."

"It's very good of Mr. Broadbent, I'm sure. But what should happen to me?"

The stranger bent nearer.

"That's best left until we get to Dodge City," he said in a whisper. "But there's folks on the lookout for you that it'd be best to keep clear of. See that man by the door?"

Harvey turned and saw one of the passengers who had travelled from Winfield, a quiet man who looked like a farmer.

"Who is he?" he asked.

There was a gleam of triumph in the man's eye as he faced him.

"Well, I don't rightly know myself," he answered, "but he's one it would not do to have on your track. Here, drink up, and have another with me. Ther hearse 'll be startin' in a minute."

There was something odd about the fellow's manner that Harvey did not like, but not caring to have a disagreement with Broadbent's messenger he complied. A curious, drowsy feeling was coming over him which he could not shake off, and an indefinable fear seized him.

"I guess I'll go back to the coach," he said; but his companion took him by the arm and led him towards one of the seats in the saloon.

"What's the matter with you, boss?"

he asked. "You don't quite look yourself."

Harvey Linnell tried to shake him off, for he felt that there was something sinister in the man's attentions. That horrible feeling of drowsiness was increasing. Already the room and its inmates looked blurred and indistinct. The sound of voices seemed to come from miles away. He tried to walk, but staggered, and would have fallen had not the other supported him. He sank heavily down into a chair in the corner of the room, unnoticed by the rest.

Then it flashed into his mind that he had been drugged. The horror of it made him struggle violently for a minute, but, though he tried to call out, his voice was little more than a whisper, and the next moment his head dropped forward on his breast and the fell drug had done its work.

* * * * *

"How much longer is you goin' to sleep here? Wake up, blame yer, an' git a move on!"

Harvey Linnell heard the words as in a dream. Someone was shaking him violently. He opened his eyes and lifted his head with an effort.

"What's the matter with you?" continued the man who was shaking him. "Is you purposin' to spend ther rest of your natural life here?"

Harvey staggered to his feet, but collapsed again. He could not realise where he was, but imagined he was back in New York again.

The next moment he was dragged to his feet and shaken and pummelled most unmercifully, dragged across the room, and flung roughly out of the door. He fell heavily, and the shaking he had already had, coupled with the shock of the fall, dispelled the effects of the drug.

He looked round and remembered where he was, but could not understand that it was now daylight.

The coach was gone, and, beyond a couple of men who stood grinning near the door, no one seemed to be in the hotel. There were no other houses near the place except what were evidently stables.

The coach road ran, white and dusty, along the foot of a densely-wooded hill, lonesome and deserted. But what struck alarm to the young man more than anything else was the fact that the sun was already low down in the west. He must have slept through the entire day.

The whole of the events of the past night flashed through his mind. He staggered back to the door.

"Guess you've bin liquidatin' a bit too free, sonnie," laughed one of the men standing there.

"I have not," retorted Harvey hoarsely. "I came in by the coach last night, and was drugged as we all stood in the saloon there."

"Oh, tell that to the jay-birds, son. You ain't ther first man that's bin knocked out by Larry's pi'zen. Where are you for?"

"I tell you I came through on the coach on my way to Dodge City, and should have gone on with it. Where's the hotel-keeper?"

"Waal, I shouldn't try ter see him if I was you. Sorter ri'led he is. We've bin shakin' and hittin' you all the blessed day, on an' off, an' Larry's sorter soured on you."

"I can't help that. I've got to get on to the city somehow. When's the next coach through?"

"Ter-morrer, ef she ain't stopped. Hallo! here's Larry."

Harvey turned, to see the hotel-keeper staring at him with no friendly eye. The man he had been talking to shouted out what the youth had said. Larry's face grew black.

"So that's your yarn, is it?" he said, striding up to Harvey. "You want to say that you've bin drugged in my house, does ye? You'll be sayin' next that I drugged you and robbed you, eh?"

At his words Harvey instinctively put his hand to his breast-pocket, where all his letters and money had keen kept in a wallet. A cry broke from him as he found the pocket empty.

"I have been robbed!" he gasped, staring at Larry with distended eyes. "That villain has taken everything I had on me!"

Larry burst into a roar of laughter that was not pleasant to hear.

"What did I say?" he cried, turning to the other men. "This young whelp comes here to sleep off his liquor, or pertend to, an' then gits up the ol' yarn that he's been drugged and robbed. But it won't wash with me! I've bin had on that game a bit too ofter. Now, then, git off with you, or I'll hurry you up with somethin' that won't agree with you!"

His hand dropped to his pocket, which bulged in a very suggestive manner.

"But surely you will listen——" began Harvey desperately, but the look on Larry's face warned him not to risk rousing the man further.

It flashed into his mind that the innkeeper was probably implicated in this business, and might take means to stop his talk for good and all.

"Can I have a horse to ride to Dodge City?" he asked.

Larry's hoarse laugh again broke out.

"You've got sauce, anyway, or else think I'm greener than I look," he growled. "What! give you a hoss? Not by a jugful, I don't, not unless you kin put down the full price right off."

"That you know is impossible," said Harvey. "I have been robbed of everything but a few dollars; but I can refer you to Mr. Broadbent, of Dodge City, and he will defray any expenses."

This statement elicited another burst of laughter from the men, and the innkeeper advanced on him threateningly.

"Now, look here," he growled, "I'm about fed up with your bluff. You jest pull stakes lively, and ef I see you hangin' round this shack any longer I'll let daylight into you as sure as my name is Larry Ellis."

He looked so thoroughly in earnest that the young man concluded it was best to go. It was useless to try to argue the matter with him. He either would not believe or did not intend to do anything to help him.

Harvey turned away and walked up the road without any plan, only knowing that he must get to Dodge City as soon as possible and let Broadbent know the disaster that had befallen him. He trudged wearily on until the sun went down in a blaze of glory behind the low hills in front. Not a soul had he seen, and no signs of habitation in all the countryside. The night came on, and he was feeling the effect of his long fast, having eaten nothing since the previous evening.

He had no idea how far Dodge City was, but judged it must be a good day's journey by coach. It would be a terrible thing to attempt it on foot without anything to eat, but he could not stay to starve. Then the thought that the coach would pass to-morrow comforted him a little. He would rest under a tree for the night, and walk on next day until overtaken by the coach. Perhaps he would find a house where he could get some food the next day.

Harvey slept well and arose refreshed. Some berries that he found helped to assuage his thirst and hunger, but as the day wore on the heat became so great that he was forced to rest again. Feeling that it was useless to go on, he waited where he was, even after the sun had gone down, and so on through the lengthening night, until at last the welcome sound of lumbering wheels told him that the long-looked-for coach was approaching.

Fearful lest in the darkness the driver should not see him, Harvey walked, or rather staggered into the middle of the road, and as the coach came near he shouted to the driver to pull up.

The only answer to his summons was a flash of light and a loud report, whilst something like a red-hot iron passed through his shoulder.

The driver had mistaken him for a hold-up, and as the coach dashed past poor Harvey fell to the ground in a dead faint.

CHAPTER 2.

A Promise and Its Consequences

"THAT's better, Joe. Shift his arm a little more this way. No bones broken, that's one good thing. Bullet gone through the skin and out the other side. Guess he's fainted from exhaustion more than anything else.

He'll be as right as a trivet as soon as he's had a bit to eat."

These words came to Harvey as in a dream. He opened his eyes to find that two men were bending over him, one of whom was winding a bandage round the wounded shoulder.

The dawn was just breaking, and there was sufficient light for him to see that both men were dressed in fringed leather coats and breeches, and were well armed Close by a couple of powerful horses cropped the short herbage which grew along the roadside.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the man who was binding him as their eyes met. "What's been happening to you, I should like to know? How do you come here, a hundred miles from nowhere?"

"I tried to stop the coach, but the driver shot me," answered Harvey, trying to sit up. "I suppose he took me for an outlaw."

"And small blame to him if he did, son. People don't generally walk out to these forsaken parts to take the coach. How did you come here?"

Briefly the wounded youth told his tale, for there was something about his questioner which inspired confidence, and he had no hesitation in telling him everything. The two men listened almost in silence until he had finished.

"Well, you've been up against some pretty bad luck, sonnie, if all you say is true. You think you were drugged and robbed deliberately as part of a plot, do you?"

"What else could it be?" answered Harvey. "How anyone came to know of my affairs is a mystery, but they'll be disappointed. Those letters that I had can be of no possible use to them. They cannot draw the money except they go to Mr. Broadbent first, and I had already sent him my photograph and several letters, so that he will see that there is something wrong."

"Then all you have to do is to get to Dodge City with as little delay as possible. We are travelling that way, and can give you a lift. You're not fit for much walking at present, and look as if you would be all the better for a feed of some sort. We'll soon fix that."

The speaker went over to the horses, and opening one of the saddle-bags produced some pemmican and biscuit, which Harvey ate with relish and felt all the better for.

During the meal the two men had left him, galloping away up the hill to the right. They returned some time after he had finished.

"Now, Mr. Linnell," said one, "the sooner we get on our way the better. You have fallen amongst thieves, so far, and perhaps it would make you easier in your mind if I let you know that I am William Cody, army scout, generally called Buffalo Bill; and my friend here is California Joe. We will see you as far as Dodge City, and hope your troubles will come to a speedy end."

Harvey thanked him gratefully, saying how fortunate he felt himself in being in such good hands. They insisted on his mounting one of the horses, taking it in turn to walk and ride by his side.

Late in the afternoon they came to a clearing with a comfortable frame-house and outbuildings standing on it. Here they procured another horse and a good meal, continuing their journey at greater speed.

At last they came in sight of Dodge City nestling at the foot of the hill down which they were riding.

"There you are, Linnell," said Buffalo Bill. "You are almost home now, and we must say good-bye. Our way lies in that direction," pointing to the hills on the left. "We may meet again later on."

"Then you are not coming into the town?"

"No, we have work to do in the hills, and do not wish to be seen, and I want you to promise that you will not mention having seen us to a soul. It is not necessary for me to explain, but I feel sure you will do as I ask."

"That I will, Mr. Cody, and I only wish I could thank you sufficiently for all you have done for me. You have saved my life."

"Well, perhaps you will be doing the same for me one of these days. Good luck to you, and I hope you will be able to discover who your assailants

were and come out top-dog all along the line."

They waved their hands to Harvey, and cantered away along a narrow bridle-path amongst the trees.

Directly he had lost sight of them Harvey's spirits sank. He had that same feeling of impending disaster that he had experienced before. It was in vain for him to try to shake it off. The nearer he got to the town the worse he felt, until he would have given anything to have had Buffalo Bill and California Joe near him again.

As he rode up the main street the coach was just preparing to leave on the return trip to Winfield. He recognised the driver at once as the man who had shot him, though he had only got a glimpse of his face in the flash of the pistol.

The man stared hard at him and said something to two others who stood near. One of them stepped forward so as to bar Harvey's passage.

"Say, you don't look over well, stranger," he cried. "S'pose you jest drop off and tell us what's the matter?"

There was a certain menace in the man's tone which Harvey did not like; but as he was going to stop at the hotel anyway, to put up his horse and make inquiries, he dismounted.

"You are right," he said, as the man came close to him and several of the bystanders moved in their direction. "I've had a pretty tough time of it lately, and our friend there didn't improve matters by putting a bullet through my shoulder."

The youth half-laughed as he spoke, but the effect of his words on the bystanders was extraordinary. Three or four revolvers were pointed at him as the driver sprang forward.

"I told you all it was the feller," he cried. "I could have sworn to him even if my bullet hadn't marked him. You're a cool one, anyway," he added, "to dare to come into the town."

"Why shouldn't I come?" asked Harvey indignantly. "You are the one who ought to be afraid to show up after shooting a man as you did."

"Oh, stow that!" growled another. "You'll find bluff don't go down with us. You tried to hold the coach up once too often, and it's a pity Bart didn't finish your business for good an' all, an' save us ther trouble of hangin' you."

As Harvey, bewildered by this sudden accusation, glanced round and noted the angry, scowling faces, he realised that he was in a tight place. The driver had really taken him for a hold-up, and had told the tale with several embellishments as soon as he had got to town.

Harvey saw that he was regarded in the light of an outlaw, and, what was worse, was believed to be a man who had been carrying on the game for some time.

"I can quite see how the mistake has arisen," he cried; "but that it is a mistake I can prove easily."

An incredulous laugh went round the crowd, which by now had assumed formidable proportions.

"Let him talk an' see what he's got to say!" "String him up, an' let him talk after!" "Stop his yawp with a bullet!" "Bring him along to ther post there!" and other cries, mingled with shouts, cat-calls, and war-whoops, came from all sides.

The man who had first spoken to Harvey held up his hand. Something in the lad's look appealed to him. He did not look like an outlaw in the smallest degree, and perhaps, after all, a mistake had occurred.

"Give him a chance, boys!" he shouted. "'Pears to me we may be barkin' up the wrong tree. This young 'un ain't much like a tough to look at, an' one thing's certain, he ain't Bull-Head. Ef he was tryin' to jump the coach, I guess it was the first time he's done it. Now, I'm a-goin', by your leave, to git to the bottom of this, and ef you'll allow me we'll carry this youngster to the hotel, where some of us kin ask him a few pointers without so much interruption."

He had grasped Harvey's arm as he was speaking, and he now led him, unresisting, towards the hotel, the crowd making way with much jeering and bitter chaff.

"Now, young man," he said as he brought Harvey into the office of the hotel, "I'm Ted Oren, sheriff of this

town, and I want to hear your tale without any frills."

Harvey related everything in such a quiet, matter-of-fact way that his hearers were almost all convinced of his innocence, and believed him to be the victim of a dark conspiracy.

"Theer's on'y one thing I'd like to ask," said Lige Manby. "How did you git hold o' that hoss if you ain't got no money? Folks round these parts as far's I know don't gen'rally give their horsefiesh away to strangers."

"The two men who found me paid for it."

"Who was they?"

"That I can't say."

"Can't say, or won't say? Which d'you mean?"

"For reasons of their own I promised not to say."

The men present looked at each other doubtfully.

"What sort o' chaps were they?"

"They looked like trappers."

"An' they asked you not to mention their names?"

"Yes, and I promised I would respect their wishes."

The men held a long whispered conversation together, when the sheriff turned to Harvey.

"It is unfortunate you cannot tell us who your unknown friends were. There have been a lot of robberies lately in this section, and it seems likely that they was the men we've been lookin' for. Of course, we only have your word for all you have told us, and several of the citizens are not at all satisfied that what you have told us is the truth. You mention your father as having lived at Sotillo, that he was shot, and that you had letters to a Mr. Broadbent of this city. There are several men here who knew Scott Linnell well, but not one of us who ever heard of a Mr. Broadbent. What address did he give you?"

"Adams Block, Fourth Avenue."

"Well, there is an Adams Block, and it won't take us long to find Mr. Broadbent if he's there. Here, you, Rube, just run round to the block and find out, will you?"

One of the "citizens" nodded and left the hotel by a back entrance so as to avoid the crowd still assembled in the street.

Harvey was left to himself during the long wait, the others talking amongst themselves, though he could tell from the way they glanced at him that he was the subject of their conversation. He felt that he was still in danger. The fact that none of those present knew Broadbent was a mystery to him. In all such towns as Dodge City everyone knew everybody, and it was impossible to live in a place or do business there and remain unknown.

The sheriff's statement sounded ominous to Harvey. He had a presentiment that Rube would return saying that no such man was known there. He began to mix Broadbent up in this plot, though he could not imagine how the lawyer was going to benefit by it.

Rube returned shortly.

"Well, did you find him?"

"Nup. There ain't no one of that name in the place, nor ever has been."

"But I had letters from him, and sent letters there myself, I tell you," cried Harvey desperately.

"So you may have," retorted the sheriff; "but that don't prove nothing. Who else do you know in the town?"

"No one. I am an utter stranger."

"You surely oughter know someone at Sotillo, then. Scott Linnell lived there five or six years. Ain't you never been there?"

"Never My father preferred that I should remain East. I don't know a soul in the place."

"Well, it's a mighty awkward state of affairs," said the sheriff, scratching his head in perplexity. "You come here, an' Bart swears you tried to hold him up. You tell us two men, perfect strangers to you, come up an' buy you a hoss an' go off, askin' you not to let on who they are. You give us the name of a man who ain't never been heard of in this town, sayin' he's one of the citizens, and then you expect us to believe you."

"I don't expect anything," said Harvey wearily. "I have told you the truth, and give you facts which could be corroborated after a little delay from New York, and if you don't

choose to believe me I can do nothing more. I'd better be going."

He moved towards the door, but the sheriff barred his way.

"No, you don't go just yet. This matter's got to be threshed out. If you've been robbed by anyone you've got to be helped to find out who it is; but if you've been tryin' the game on other fools, then we want to have a say about it. I guess you'd better go with me, and I'll put you where you'll be safe for a spell, an' give you time to get over that wound."

A grunt of approval came from the others, and taking his prisoner, for such Harvey was, by the arm the sheriff led him to the back part of the building, and so gained a side street. Along this they hurried until the town gaol was reached.

"Now, if you're sensible you'll not try any tricks so long as you are here," said the sheriff, not unkindly. "I ain't so sure that you ain't all you pertend to be, but there's them as thinks otherwise, and it'd be bad if you was to meet them jest now. You jest make yourself comf'table an' we'll try an' thresh this thing out later on."

He left the room and Harvey sank down on a chair feeling utterly miserable. Everything seemed to be against him. How was he to prove his innocence in a place where he knew no one? And how was he to prove his identity at the bank? They would certainly not give up Scott Linnell's money to him unless he could do so.

Then it suddenly struck him what all this might mean. He had been so taken up with other things that he had not thought of the reason for all this plotting on the part of some unknown men They meant to get hold of the money themselves, and had stolen all his credentials so as to put someone forward who would personate himself at the bank.

The thought was maddening. He racked his brain to try to think out some plan of checkmating them. They had got a good start. In all probability the business had been concluded by now, and he was a penniless pauper. If only the sheriff would come back he would try to persuade him to let him go to Sotillo and stop the payment of the money until he could get fresh credentials from New York.

He would get one of his father's old friends to come out West and establish his claim. There were several who would do so for his father's sake. But it must be done at once, or there would be no chance of saving his fortune.

After a time he was conscious of a murmuring sound that increased to an angry roar. The crowd were round the prison, and were clamouring for him to be brought out. A deadly fear seized him. How often he had heard of prisoners torn from the gaol to be hanged or shot by the infuriated mob!

Not even the sheriff and his men would avail against such a force as must be collected outside. But the fear was only momentary. A feeling of rage succeeded that these men should be such fools as to believe that he, a youngster only just out of college, could be terrorising the Wild West as an outlaw! At any rate, if they broke into the place they would find that he could die bravely.

At last a step was heard in the passage outside. The door was flung open, and the sheriff appeared. He was cool and collected, but his eyes burned like fire. The roar of the crowd came through the open door.

"They won't believe your story at any price," he said. "Half of my men are away in the hills. I can't defend the place for more than an hour if they attack. You've got to get out. Can you ride?"

"Yes, and shoot, too! Give me a chance of my life, sheriff; and I swear you will never regret it!"

"Will you swear that you are innocent?"

"Yes; and to prove my words on part of the story, at any rate, I can tell you the names of the two men who helped me. They were——" But suddenly he stopped. "No, I can't do it! They made me promise, and I'll stick to it if I die for it!"

The sheriff shrugged his shoulders.

"You can prove it later on if you get out of this alive. Come, follow me!"

He passed quickly from the room, down a long passage to another room. Here he stopped, drew back a piece of matting, and pulled at a ring in the floor. A trap-door lifted, disclosing a flight of steps down which he went, Harvey following him in wonder.

The sheriff lighted a lantern which hung on a hook, and, running back, closed the trap, shooting a heavy bolt into place.

"That'll stop them for a time," he said. "Now, step lively."

Harvey did not need much pressing. He followed at a run along the passage for a distance of forty or fifty yards, when they came to another flight of steps leading upwards. The sheriff mounted, and after a little trouble forced back the bolt that fastened the trap.

Harvey followed, and found himself in a stable in which stood four horses. One of these the sheriff quickly saddled and led out into the yard.

"This street will lead you out into the avenue running parallel with Main Street. Go down it until you come to the river; there is a small bridge there. When you have crossed, bear right round and ride for the hills. By riding due west you will come out at the cross-roads which will take you to Sotillo. I ain't sure that I'm acting right, but I'm givin' you the benefit of the doubt. Hurry, now, and ride careful."

With heartfelt gratitude Harvey wrung his hand.

"You'll find some day that you were right. I'll never rest until I have proved it, sheriff!" he cried as he jumped into the saddle and galloped away.

CHAPTER 3.

The Sheriff's Success—Attacked by a Desperado

Dodge City did not recover its serenity for many hours after Harvey escaped. Ted Oren, the sheriff, returned by the secret passage to the gaol, where he found his scanty force of men looking anything but pleased at the prospect before them. The crowd were storming and yelling in the street, and already heavy stones were crashing against the barred doors and windows.

"They won't stop at that long," said one of the men as Oren joined them. "They'll be stormin' the place in another two or three minutes, and some few of us will be passin' in our checks!"

"I don't think we will come to that, boys. We'll keep them occupied a bit longer. I've got a little surprise for them, and I don't think they will get the prisoner this time. That kid ain't no more guilty than I am, an' I've provided for his safety until his story can be looked into."

The men, it must be confessed, looked infinitely relieved at this news. They were all brave fellows enough, and if it came to a fight they would have upheld their trust to the last. But there was something utterly distasteful to them in having to fight against their own townsfolk and friends in defence of a stranger whose credentials every one had reason to doubt.

For ten minutes Oren waited, until a tremendous blow on the gate told him that the crowd were trying to batter it in with a beam.

"Now, boys, stand by to prevent a rush. I'm going to speak to them."

He crossed the yard as half a dozen men appeared on the top of the wall, mounted on ladders.

"Why can't you attend to your own business and leave me to look after mine?" he shouted.

"It's our business to pertect our lives an' property, Ted Oren!" answered one of them. "Now, you've got that youngster, an' we mean to have him. He and his pals has bin playin' up quite long ernough in these parts, an' we's goin' to settle the bus'ness right away. You hand him over peaceable, and no harm will happen to you, but—we're—boun'—to—have—him!"

"That's as maybe, Josh. You all tried that game ten months ago, an' seein' you looked likely to be up to your games again I took the trouble to put the kid where he's safe. You couldn't get him ef you was to tear the hull place to bits!"

This statement, passed on to the waiting crowds, was received with a

yell of derision. The gaol was surrounded on every side, and it was impossible for anyone to have got away.

"You can tell those fairy-tales to the next man, Ted! It don't go down with this crowd. Come! open the door quietly, and we'll take him off without any trouble."

"Well, boys, you doubt my word, but you can look for yourselves. If you'll promise not to rush the place I'll open and let in half a dozen, who can look round and find out for themselves. Will that suit?"

The crowd held a hurried consultation.

"We'll agree," said the spokesman, "on the consideration that if we find ther kid you'll let us take him off without trouble."

"Agreed again," said Oren, and he called one of the men to throw down the bars and open the gate.

The deputation from the citizens passed in, the gate was closed again, and the sheriff conducted them into the gaol.

Every nook and corner was carefully searched, but at last the committee of examination was compelled to admit that the prisoner was not in the building. There were few hiding-places in it, the place being built on plain and simple lines, and it was with looks of baffled rage that they at last faced Oren.

"What have you done with him?" they asked.

"That's my business," said the sheriff. "He was my prisoner, and I had to see to his safety. I've done so, and you-all can't blame me."

"Waal, you've got ahead of us this time, Ted," said one of the men. "We can't, as you say, blame you fer lookin' after your prisoners; but if any trouble comes of it you are responsible, an' I reckon we-all will have a say in the matter."

"I'm willin' to take that responsibility, Sam. You'd 'a' done the same if you'd been in my shoes. Get that crowd away from the front, an' we'll adjourn to a more cheerful spot."

There was some trouble in persuading the crowd to move away. Now that they were compelled to believe that their intended victim was not in the prison, there was no excuse for them to break in, but many of the more fiery were for punishing the sheriff, until the more peaceably-inclined overruled their desire, and slowly and reluctantly they gradually went off.

There were two men who had been particularly busy in fomenting the disturbance, and were now furious at this totally unexpected turn of affairs. They seemed to think that the committee had been tampered with, and that their report was not to be believed.

One of them was rash enough to propound this theory in the hearing of one of those who had searched the prison, and instantly found himself covered by that worthy's revolver.

"You don't believe what we told you, eh, Snyder? In other words you call me a liar, do you?"

The man recoiled.

"I wasn't sayin' that," he said; "but it seems mighty strange that Oren could have got him away, that's all."

"So others thought, yit they ain't doubtin' our story like you is. An' I think it would be better ef you was to believe it, too!"

The finger round the trigger pressed ever so little, and Snyder, his dark face pale with fear or anger, took back all he had said, and the other returned his gun to his belt and walked away.

Snyder and his companion sneaked off, and in a few minutes the space in front of the gaol was completely deserted.

Late the same evening Buffalo Bill and California Joe rode through the almost empty streets, shunning the parts where the saloons were in full swing, until they pulled up at the sheriff's house.

Oren welcomed them, whilst expressing surprise at their visit.

"We're here on important business, Oren, in which we want your help. A man named Lee—or Indian Lee—a deserter and renegade, is known to be in this neighbourhood. He was principally responsible for the massacre at Tascona, on the Canadian River. When the Indians were scattered and returned to their lands he escaped, and we heard by accident that he has been

seen round these parts. Can you help us in any way?"

"What is the man like?"

"A thick-set fellow, very muscular, and a good shot. Has long black hair and very dark complexion."

The sheriff laughed.

"There are a dozen men that I can lay hands on in this town answering that description. Have you nothing else to go by?"

"Well, he was noted more especially for his extraordinarily thick neck and bullet-shaped head."

"Ah! now you're talking. For the last two months or more there have been several hold-ups in the neighbourhood, and the author of them has been described two or three times, and always that peculiarity noted especially. So much so, that the people round here call him Bull-Head. That's your man, for a thousand!"

"So I should imagine. Where was he seen?"

"He was around here for some time, but lately he's been more over Sotillo way. That's where you'll most likely spot him. We had a little fuss to-day with a fellow who was supposed to have tried to stop the coach the night before last. But he was on'y a youngster, and declared that he had hailed Bart so as to get taken on. But Bart declares the chap tried to hold him up and got a bullet through the shoulder for his pains."

"Yes, we found the fellow and brought him on," said Cody. "I hope he didn't get into trouble."

"Oh, it was you, was it, that got that horse for him? He said that someone had helped him, but as he wouldn't say who it was it was only thought to be one of his yarns. Then you believed his story?"

"Why not? He told a very straight yarn, and though we both tried to catch him tripping at different times we couldn't shake him."

"Well, Bart saw him comin' in this morning, and as feelin' has been runnin' pretty high lately over these robberies, the boys jumped for him, and I had to take him to the calaboose for his own safety. There was somethin' about the lad that made me think he was all right, and I smuggled him away whilst the boys were hammerin' at the doors. I am glad of it now, though why in thunder he didn't tell me he had seen you I can't make out!"

"We asked him to say nothing about it, as we don't want it known we are here. If Bull-Head gets to hear of it he will leave for other parts, and all our trouble will be wasted."

"I remember he said he couldn't say who helped him, and that sorter fixed his guilt with the boys. He's a plucky youngster to have stuck to his promise like that, anyhow."

"Where did you send him?"

"To Sotillo. He wanted to git there and interview the bank manager."

"And you think we shall be nearer our man there, too, eh?"

"I do, fer a fact. This neighbourhood is a little too warm for him, and he's been heard of round there on'y two or three days ago."

"Then that's where we'll go, Joe. We'll get off at once whilst the citizens are busy in the saloons and are not likely to be spotting us. If you hear of anything that might assist us, Oren, you might send a message to the 'Salter House' at Sotillo. We'll get it somehow."

"I'll do that with all the pleasure in life, addressin' the document to 'Joe Williams.' An' if you see that young feller, tell him I'll make it all right for him here if he wants to come back. I guessed I wasn't far wrong in believin' his yarn, though it was mighty strange he should have given as ref'rence the name of a man that ain't known in the town."

This part of the story Buffalo Bill had not heard, and the sheriff told him what had happened.

"Then he's either a bigger rascal than he seems to be, or he is the victim of some rascal who is trying to get his money. We'll look him up at Sotillo and find out all about it."

"I reckon we've hit the trail pretty close, Joe," said the scout as they rode along a quiet road through the outskirts of the town. "There's no doubt that Bull-Head and Indian Lee are one and the same person, and I hope to get

on his trail soon. That is, if he doesn't get on our track first. He is pretty sure to have some confederate hanging about the towns to put him on to a good thing and give him warning of danger. We'll have to separate, Joe. You aren't so well known round these parts as I am. You can do the 'Old Man of the Hills' trick, and stay round a bit, whilst I lie low outside. It is hardly likely that anyone will recognise you, and between the two of us we ought to get that fellow's measure pretty quickly."

Joe grunted at this arrangement a little. There were few things he disliked more than loafing about one of these "one-horse" towns with nothing to do but hang around the bars and saloons. But it was undoubtedly the best thing to be done in this case, and there was nothing for him to do but to acquiesce in the arrangement.

They were still a mile outside Sotillo when Joe's horse, which was slightly in advance, tripped over some obstruction and fell heavily. Joe landed on his feet just as a hoarse voice shouted to them to stand still.

"There's a rope here!" shouted Joe to Buffalo Bill, who instantly wheeled his horse and dashed for the thicket, firing as he charged.

Joe's revolver was ready, too. He had thrown himself down behind the fallen horse, waiting for the unknown to return Cody's fire, so as to get a pointer as to where to aim.

But no answering shot came from the scrub bordering the road. The man, whoever he was, had no doubt thought to have it all his own way, and the energetic action of the scout had to some extent upset his calculations.

Buffalo Bill sprang from his horse directly he reached the bushes and glided away amongst them. But the "hold-up" had slipped away, and so silently and quickly that even those two keen trailers heard nothing of his going.

For twenty minutes the scout searched the place, Joe lying where he was, afraid to venture amongst the scrub in case Buffalo Bill should mistake him for their assailant and treat him to a dose of lead. At last the scout returned, having made a complete circuit of the place without result.

"He's gone, Joe. We can't do anything here to-night. We'll have to wait until to-morrow, and if he hasn't covered his trail we can follow it."

"That's what he will do," growled Joe, assisting his horse to rise. "He's no slouch, whoever he is, ter git away like that."

He had hardly spoken when a shot rang out from the bushes on the other side of the road and behind them. Joe's horse reared straight up on its hind legs and fell over with a sickening crash as another shot whizzed past Cody's head.

The latter was out of the saddle in an instant, but a third bullet struck his horse as he was about to take shelter behind it, and the animal, with a frightened snort, dashed away up the road.

Buffalo Bill barely escaped being knocked over, for the horse's shoulder struck him and hurled him backwards towards the bushes. He recovered himself, however, and instantly went to cover. But he had to do with a deadly cunning man. Now that the scout was in a position to fire the unknown gave not the slightest indication of his whereabouts. The flash of the revolver that Buffalo Bill and Joe were both waiting for never came. The man had no doubt shifted his position, as at first.

Joe was lying nearly helpless, pinned down by the leg under the weight of his dead horse. His eyes searched the dark masses of scrub, and he listened for the slightest sound. Nothing moved. He called softly to Buffalo Bill. There was no answer, and he concluded that the scout had gone off again to locate their dangerous foe.

He lay there for half an hour or more, hearing and seeing nothing, when a hand suddenly grasped him by the throat, his pistol was seized and wrenched from his hand, and he was crushed face downwards to the ground, without having been able to make a sound.

"Move hand or foot an' I'll put this through you!" growled a low voice.

California Joe felt the prick of a

knife at the nape of his neck. The warning was hardly necessary, for, handicapped as he was, he could not struggle. He felt the man quickly unhitch his belt of arms and drag it from under him, and a hand was thrust into his pockets in search of valuables.

Joe grinned, for he carried all but a few loose coins in his boot, and that happened to be underneath the dead horse. His want of luck made the robber savage.

"You dog-gone pauper, you! You ain't got enough on you ter pay fer the cartridges I wasted. Who are you, anyway? You're well-heeled enough to make the sheriff suspect you was an outlaw. I reckon you'll lie quiet there while I git after your fool pard."

He twisted a rag tightly round Joe's mouth and head, and treated his wrists in the same manner, securing the hands behind his back.

"You'll do now. Pleasant dreams to you!"

Joe felt the pressure on his back removed as the man got up, heard him give an exclamation; there were two loud reports following close together, the sound of someone crashing through the bushes, a heavy blow and the fall of a body, another shot, the "pad-pad" of quick-running feet, and then silence.

Joe struggled vainly to break his wrists free. He was blindfolded and nearly suffocated. Buffalo Bill must have fired two of those shots, anyway, but what was the meaning of that heavy blow, and who had fallen? His anxiety was terrible. He tried all he could to drag his leg from under the horse. The limb was nearly powerless, and he had to give over the attempt.

Joe must have lain there for another half-hour, when he again heard footsteps approaching and Buffalo Bill's voice calling to him. Then the hateful wrap was torn from his head and his arms were freed with the stroke of a knife. He turned and saw the scout, whose face was streaming with blood from a wound on the forehead.

"That was touch and go, Joe!" cried the scout cheerily. "I thought you were killed. We'll soon get you out of that."

He seized the horse, and by main strength dragged it away until Joe could release his leg. The limb was benumbed and useless.

"Bone broken?" asked Buffalo Bill, kneeling down and feeling carefully all up the leg. "You're in luck, Joe. I believe you're as sound as a bell, and only cramped from the position and weight of the animal."

And so it proved. The road was loose sand, and, fortunately, no damage had been done. In five minutes Joe was able, with Buffalo Bill's help, to stand and presently to walk.

"We must get out of this as quickly as possible, Joe. That fellow is as cute as twenty Indians. I tried hard to get on his track, but he led me right away, and then seemed to vanish. I couldn't get on his track again, and was coming back to you, when I saw him just getting away from you. He saw me, too. I never dreamt he would be there, and had walked straight out of the bushes before seeing him. He fired just before I did, and dashed for cover. I dodged round to intercept him, and he hurled something at me which struck me on the head and knocked me over for a second. He thought he had killed me, but I pulled round in time to get in a shot, and he bolted, limping badly, with me at a dead run after him. He led me another chase, but I'm blest if he hasn't got clean away! Now we must get into Sotillo as soon as possible, and start again good and early to run him to earth."

California Joe had bound up Buffalo Bill's head whilst the latter was explaining. There was a deep gash, as if a knife had been thrown, but the scout declared it was something else. He ran to the spot, and, after a groping search, found the weapon. It was an ordinary Indian tomahawk.

"That about proves who our friend is," said Buffalo Bill. "There are few white men who carry and can use this weapon. Indian Lee always uses one, and if the light had been a bit better the blade would certainly have split my skull."

"If the light had been a bit better Indian Lee wouldn't have been alive to throw that blarmed thing!" said Joe,

with warmth. "You don't gen'rally miss 'em in daylight, Bill, and I wouldn't mind betting you a hundred dollars that you winged Lee, and we shall catch him easily."

"I hope so, Joe, for, 'pon my word, he's as dangerous and tricky as anyone I ever had to do with! I shan't feel safe until I've got into Sotillo."

"The brute boned my belt," said Joe ruefully. "Lend me one of your guns, Bill. I'll never be able to walk far onless I've got the butt in my hand."

"Just how I feel, Joe," laughed the scout. "I'm not generally nervous, but our friend has such tricky little ways of getting up to you and away again that I'm blest if I don't jump every time I hear a leaf rattle!"

Buffalo Bill spoke jestingly, yet, for all that, there was a lot of truth in what he said. Their opponent had shown himself such a tricky and daring fighter that it was more than likely he was lurking in the bushes somewhere along the road, and might drop the two of them at any moment.

The light of the moon could not penetrate the thick bushes, amongst the dense shadows of which a hundred men might lurk without being seen.

But nothing further happened, and they reached Sotillo in safety, making their way to the "Salter House."

They entered the hotel by the back entrance, as, although it was so late, there were still a number of men about the front entrance.

The proprietor was soon with them, and, being an old acquaintance, promised he would do all he could to assist them and keep their presence a secret. He showed them up to his own bedroom, left them to their well-earned rest, and hurried away to speed his parting guests.

CHAPTER 4.

Misfortune on Misfortune

Harvey Linnell reached Sotillo without accident, and put up at the "Salter House." He had decided that the first thing to do was to go to the bank and stop payment of the money which his father had deposited there.

On presenting himself at the bank he asked to see the manager.

"What name shall I say?" asked the clerk.

"Harvey Linnell. My business is private and important."

The clerk stared at him in a curious way as he gave his name, but said nothing, and went off to the manager's room, reappearing in a minute to ask Harvey to step forward.

The manager was standing near his desk, and looked keenly at the visitor.

"Good-morning!" he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I have called upon you in reference to a sum of money which my father deposited with the bank some short time ago."

The manager's eyebrows lifted.

"Might I ask you again who you are?" he asked.

"I am Harvey Linnell, the only son of Scott Linnell, who, I believe, was shot near this town a week or so ago, and I understand that——"

"Wait a bit, young fellow! You say you are the only son of Scott Linnell. Can you prove it?"

"Unfortunately, no—at least, not at the moment, as I am a complete stranger here and have no friends nearer than New York."

"Then how, in the name of common sense, did you suppose you were going to get hold of any money—supposing there had been any as you suggest?"

"That is rather a long tale, sir, but if you will listen I can explain my present difficult position."

"Look here, young fellow," said the manager, "I have been tried with this game twice already. There seems to be a run on my credulity and old Linnell's money. I'll give you two minutes to get into the street, and——"

"For Heaven's sake, what are you saying?" cried Linnell, his face going deathly white. "You haven't paid that money over, have you?"

"Never mind whether I have or whether I have not. I only know that I am not likely to be taken in with any yarn you——"

"But, sir, you must listen to me!" cried Harvey earnestly. "If you have

paid the money it has been through an infamous trick carefully worked up by the villains who have robbed me and made me their unsuspecting tool. This is a matter of life and death to me, and you must hear me!"

"So the other man said, and I think I can tell you just what he told me. You got a letter from a lawyer named Broadbent, telling you to come and bring letters of identification to Dodge City, so that you could claim certain moneys and securities deposited in this bank. You came at once, and were robbed of all your letters by some scoundrel who knew your business, and have only just managed to reach here. Isn't that so?"

Harvey Linnell listened in utter amazement as the manager glibly ran through the main points in his wretched story. He could not answer for a moment.

"You see, I know it all, my friend," continued the manager, mistaking the cause of Harvey's silence. "I heard the same tale last evening most touchingly recited; but unfortunately for the last applicant, as with you, I expect a vital point had been missed, a certain precaution had not been taken, and the last man only saved himself from the calaboose by a hasty retreat. Now you can follow his example."

"But, sir, this is far worse than I expected," stammered Harvey. "I can prove my story up to the hilt with the necessary time. It is as you have repeated it, and only differs in some few ways."

But the manager ruthlessly cut him short.

"I can listen to no more," he said brusquely. "If it is any satisfaction to you to know it, you are too late with your scheme, anyway. The real owner of the property had safeguarded his interests, and was conclusively proved to be the right person to whom the money should be paid."

"In all fairness to me you should tell me how he proved it, sir."

"I am under no obligation to discuss the matter further," said the manager, ringing the bell for his clerk. "I should strongly advise you to make as short a stay as possible in the town. Mullins," to the clerk who at that moment appeared, "show this—er—gentleman the front door. He's not to be admitted to the bank again!"

Harvey took a step forward, his eyes blazing, but the manager's hand suddenly came up, and a business-like revolver covered the angry youth. He never flinched.

"You may be acting in the best faith, sir," he said slowly; "but, if so, you have been duped as I have, and one day I will prove it."

He swung round on his heel, and, attended closely by the grinning clerk, strode out of the building.

The poor fellow was now in a desperate state. He saw that the conspiracy had been worked up with the greatest care, and that if he were to ever succeed in tracking the men it would only be by sheer luck. They had evidently sent another youngster like himself to the bank, after they had drawn the money, to tell a yarn such as Harvey must tell, so as to discount his story should he ever turn up himself.

It was a clever move, and had proved most successful, and it would take a lot now to induce the manager to acknowledge he was in the wrong. In fact, nothing but the most convincing proofs of Harvey's identity would be of the slightest use.

These would take a long time to produce, and meant a big expenditure of money, and, as it was, he only had the few dollars which had been left to him by the men who took his papers.

The first thing to do would be to write to New York and tell Eldon Carr the whole story. Carr would send him funds at once, and would arrange to have the identification question settled without a doubt. He could do nothing more.

Carr had given him letters to certain people in the town and also in Dodge City, but he only remembered the names of two of them, and he felt it was useless in the circumstances to go to them.

The villains who had so carefully prepared the bank manager would be sure to make the other men safe, and it would only be waste of time

and be a fresh humiliation to call upon them.

Harvey returned slowly to the hotel. Here, at any rate, he could stay and live quiet, keeping to himself in case any of the Dodge City crowd came over. His horse could be sold if money was needed; but as long as he had the animal he knew he could stay at the place without being pressed for his bill.

On reaching the "Salter House" he made his way to a small, badly-lighted room off the main hall, through the glass door of which he could see everyone who came into the hotel. The room was intended for the use of those who wished to write in quiet, but, owing to the bad light, was very seldom used.

Harvey had not been sitting there for more than ten minutes when a man, whom he instantly recognised as one of the crowd who had been most against him at Dodge City, came in, went up to the clerk, and spoke to him. The latter beckoned to one of the call-boys, who ran off up the stairs, the stranger going over to a table near the window.

Five minutes later a young fellow about Harvey's age came down and took a chair next to the stranger. They talked together for some time, and then the man took what looked like a roll of notes out of his pocket and proceeded to count them.

The younger man watched him eagerly, and at the conclusion of the operation also produced a small packet of papers. This he and the other examined, and, everything appearing satisfactory, the two packets changed hands.

Harvey was astounded to recognise amongst the papers which the younger man produced several of the very letters he had sent to "Mr. Broadbent." They had been written on a peculiar coloured paper that there was no mistaking.

The lad's heart thumped against his ribs when he first recognised them, but in a few minutes he realised that he must be cool and not risk a thing if he wanted to come by his own again.

To rush and accuse the two men of robbery would be fatal. No one would be likely to believe his word against theirs. He therefore sat still, watching every movement of the two men as a cat watches two birds that she cannot get at. For some few minutes they sat, laughing over the success of their plot probably, when the elder one got up and moved towards the door.

The other sat still for a moment, but the Dodge City man beckoned to him impatiently, and he, too, rose and went out into the street, after placing the roll of notes in an inner pocket and buttoning his coat.

As they turned down the street Harvey jumped up and followed them. He pulled his hat well down over his face to escape recognition. But there seemed little fear of the men noticing him. They went on until they reached a saloon, which they entered.

After a few moments Harvey ventured in, too. They were standing at the far end of the room, and the elder one was trying to induce his companion to go into an inner room which was used for cards. He would not go, however, and they had another "refresher," leaving the saloon by a side door. Three other places were visited in the same way, Harvey not venturing to enter, but waiting until they reappeared, and keeping them constantly under observation.

At last they reached the roughest part of the town and went into a disreputable "dive," from which came the sounds of savage, drunken laughter.

Harvey waited for some time, so long indeed that he began to fear that his quarry must have left by another door. But as he was moving round to see if there were such an exit a terrible commotion broke out in the place.

There were shouts and oaths, the sound of furious struggling, the overturning of chairs, and the crash of falling tables. Two or three shots rang out, and just as he reached his former place the door opened and the man from Dodge City dashed into the street, followed by a number of disreputable-looking toughs, who slunk away in different directions.

Harvey noticed that the boy was not with them, and he pushed open the half-doors and entered. The place was empty. Chairs and tables, overturned

and broken, were lying in the utmost confusion. The floor was littered with dirty cards, broken bottles, and fragments of torn clothing. Two of the lamps had been smashed, and the room was filled with a stifling smoke.

But Harvey hardly noticed these things. His eyes became riveted on a still form lying in one corner. A small stream, dark and sluggish, crawled over the filthy floor. The body was lying face downwards, half-doubled up, motionless. He sprang towards it, recognising by the clothes the young fellow he had followed from the hotel. With a scarcely-repressed shudder he knelt down, turned the body, and saw that there was a deep knife-wound in the chest. The coat had been torn open, and the shirt was in rags as if there had been a struggle.

Harvey drew his handkerchief and was endeavouring to stanch the blood, when the door swung open and a patrolman, followed by several others, rushed in.

The youth turned round and faced the newcomers.

"He's not quite dead, officer," he began, when one of the men suddenly sprang forward.

"That's the feller what done it," he cried, pointing to Harvey. "He's the same what stopped the coach and escaped from Dodge City this morning. I saw him there when he was took."

Harvey stared at the speaker in horror, but as the patrolman started for him the desperate nature of his position and the utter falseness of this last accusation filled him with fury and despair. He would not wait to risk the Western sense of justice a second time.

There was a door behind the bar counter standing slightly ajar. Harvey was on his feet in an instant.

The patrolman dashed at him, but with the skill of a practised football player he slipped under his hands, struck down one of those who endeavoured to bar his way, vaulted clean over the bar counter, and sprang through the doorway before the astonished crowd had realised what was happening.

The young man heard a roar of voices and trampling of feet as he ran up a narrow passage in which a lamp was burning.

Another door barred his progress, but he gave a gasp of joy as he found it open to his hand. Two loud reports crashed out behind him as he sprang through the doorway into a narrow, dark alley, and the yells of the pursuers warned him that he must run to the left.

It was so dark that Harvey could not see what was in front, but he ran on blindly, spurred to put forth his greatest speed by those threatening shouts behind. He nearly dashed into a wall at the end of the passage, but, swinging round, saw another street in front of him. Down this he ran as he had never run before, turning round the first corner, conscious that he had been seen before he reached it.

Fortunately there were few people about at that hour, and, running as noiselessly as he could, dodging and twisting round numerous turnings, he at last left the sound of the chase behind, and slowed down to a walk as he emerged into the better lighted main street.

But he was in a part that he had not seen before, and had no idea where the hotel was. He had thought to get there, mount his horse, and ride away from the town, which would assuredly be too hot to hold him now.

Harvey asked a man to direct him, and found that he was some distance away from the "Salter House."

Walking quickly he had just reached a cross street when two men nearly ran into him. One of them turned to look, and instantly raised that horrible cry which the poor lad had learned to dread with unspeakable loathing.

He had come right on two of the men who had seen him and were at that moment expecting to cut off his retreat in that direction. Had they taken the matter quietly they could have easily captured him, but that cry saved Harvey.

Keenly alert as he was, at the very first sound he doubled back, and, dodging in and out of the people standing near the corner, had run through them before they saw what was happening.

Again that terrible chase went on.

Several times he was shot at, but the bad light and his fleetness of foot made the shooting erratic and rather helpful than otherwise, for those citizens who were about and might have intercepted him cleared like magic as the bullets hummed through the street, and the lad was left with a clear line ahead of him.

Harvey reached the end of the street with the crowd in full cry behind, and ran past a series of vacant lots, with the black darkness of the open country before him.

Now he felt he was comparatively safe, but he ran on with undiminished speed, turning off the road across a sandy flat until at last he reached the pinewoods, which offered the strongest possible security in the circumstances.

But only for a time. His heart sank as he thought of the morning. The whole country would be scoured as soon as the short night was past and it was light enough to see.

Well, he would give them a run for their money, anyway. The hills were not far off where it would be easier to blind his trail, and he would put as many miles between him and the hateful town as he could in the few hours that were left.

As Harvey ran on he thought of the question of food in this wilderness. He had had a meal at the hotel, but what would he do later on? Well, that must be left to chance. He was not dead yet, and, after all, it was preferable to take his chances in the hills than to die a shameful death at the hands of an infuriated mob.

Hour after hour, therefore, he kept on at a steady trot, until at length the rapidly rising ground compelled him to ease up a little.

As the lad got higher he left the woods and came out on to a bare rocky plateau, and made the most of the opportunity to increase his speed. He ran until he felt he could go no further, and sank down on a patch of sun-baked grass to rest his weary limbs.

As he sat there gazing over the dark country lying far below, he thought he could distinguish the glow of a fire about a mile away.

A feeling of insupportable loneliness and a desire for some sort of companionship came over him. He thought of the two brave scouts who had befriended him at a critical moment. If they were only near, he would soon put things straight. Perhaps that was their camp-fire.

At the thought he got up, and after carefully noting the position of the fire made his way painfully down the hill. This part was far rougher, and the undergrowth more dense, than where he had come through.

Harvey stumbled down the steep places and tore his way through the clinging pine scrub, urged on by his desire to get to the camp and quite heedless of the necessity of approaching a strange place with caution.

The gleam of the firelight through the trees close by affected the young man like a draught of strong wine, and he presently dashed into a small open space with a cry of delight.

The cry died on his lips as he saw the place was empty. The fire burned low, but even to his untutored eyes it was evident that someone had been there lately. He stood still, looking round the deserted spot with a feeling of the keenest disappointment. Then, thinking the camper might be somewhere round, he called two or three times loudly. No answer, however, greeted him, and he was about to call out again when——

"Shut yer head, you fool, an' throw up yer hands!"

The words, spoken in a deep, savage voice, made him start, but he instinctively obeyed the order.

CHAPTER 5.

Bull-Head's Pard

"Now, p'r'aps you'll tell me what you're doing in this place?"

The speaker advanced from behind until he faced Harvey, keeping a formidable revolver pointed at him. He was a powerful-looking fellow, but though rough-looking, as most of the men in those parts were, he was decently dressed, and carried himself well.

"I got lost on the hills, and seeing your fire thought I could get something to eat and drink."

The man looked him up and down critically. Then, with a short laugh, he lowered his gun and thrust it back into his belt.

"You may think yourself lucky, youngster, that you didn't git somethin' inside you that you'd 've found pretty hard to digest. From the noise you made gittin' here I thought the camp was bein' rushed by Injuns, and was ready to drop you in your tracks. You're a nice figure to look at, too! What you bin doin'?"

Harvey glanced down at his clothes. They were torn in a dozen places from his rapid passages through the undergrowth and pine scrub, and he looked like a pretty tough lot.

Not willing to tell his story to a stranger, who, for all he knew, might disbelieve his innocence and walk him off to Sotillo again, he repeated his first statement.

"I got lost in the hills. I've been wandering round for a long time, and began to fear I should never find my way."

"Well, you look's if you'd tramped from the other side of nowhere. I took you for a 'bad man' when I first saw you, but anyone can see you're a tenderfoot. So you're a bit hungry and thirsty, eh?"

"I am. I've not had much to-day, and have been on the move for hours."

"We'll soon fix that."

The stranger got up and threw some fresh sticks on the fire, opened a canvas bag, and produced some dried meat and biscuit.

"Just git outside o' that while I wrastle out some tea," he said, and, nothing loth, Harvey started to demolish the welcome food.

He watched the man as he hung a small tin pail over the flames, after filling it from a small stream which ran past one side of the camp.

A tin mug was next placed beside him, and his host sat watching him eat, puffing at a short black pipe in silence.

As the water boiled the man threw in a liberal supply of tea, and, unhitching the pail, placed it near his guest.

Not a word was spoken until the youngster had satisfied his cravings.

"Now tell us all about it," said the man. "What are you runnin' away for? Who is it you've killed?"

Harvey started, but indignantly denied having killed anyone.

The stranger smiled indulgently.

"All right, young 'un. I don't want to know your business if you don't want to tell me, but ef ther sheriff is after you it mightn't be a bad thing to have a friend near."

Then it struck Harvey that it would be wise perhaps to tell this man his story. He might be of some use in advising him as to where to go or how to escape in case the Sotillo crowd succeeded in following his trail.

"You've guessed right," he said slowly. "I have been run out of Sotillo, and as likely as not they'll be hunting me as soon as it's light enough. I have done nothing to deserve it, but admit that appearances are very much against me. I'd better tell you how it is, and trust to your care to help me to escape from the men if I am chased."

"You're safe enough with me, sonnie. You're not the furst man huntin' a hole to hide in. There's dozens of 'em in the hills; I've helped a good few of 'em in my time. So fire ahead an' tell us all about it."

Harvey gave the man a pretty full account of what he had been through, his story eliciting several grunts of surprise from the stranger. He seemed particularly interested over the money part of the business, several times interrupting with a question.

"Waal, you've cut into a pretty bad streak of luck!" he exclaimed, as the story concluded. "That joker'll be a pretty tough nut to crack, I'm thinking. Reckon he promised that boy a big share in the swag for helpin' him. The young 'un must have kept the papers, or some of them, until he had got his price. Ther man took 'em, and then calc'lated to git his money back, too, killed and robbed the boy, and has now no witnesses to tell what he's been up to. My! but he must be a smart chap as played this game. But——"

He stopped, and sat gazing into the fire for some moments.

"Think you'd know the feller ag'in?" he asked suddenly.

"Know him? I shall never forget him!"

"Then I guess there's a chance to level up with him. Are you game to try?"

"Only tell me how, and you'll soon see how game I am."

"Waal, it's this way: That chap has got the notes. That's a moral. Now, what's he goin' to do with 'em? He's not likely to stay in Sotillo. He'll leave there, sure, ef he ain't done so already. If he's left, we've got to find out whar he's gone. He'll carry the stuff with him, you can bet on that. He ain't likely to try night travellin' either. Too many toughs in the hills to risk that. Then we've got to watch the road. He's pretty nigh certain to get back to Dodge City, an' he won't travel until sun-up. If he does, we're too late for him now; but I'll stake my reppytation he don't leave until to-morrow. Very well, then; all we've got ter do is ter watch out for him, knock a hole in his karkiss, an' get the swag. You can give me a share for my help. What d'you say?"

"Well, it looks very much like robbery, and I doubt whether we shall get it from him unless he is killed."

"An' you don't care to treat him as he would have treated you?" growled the stranger disgustedly. "Shoo! Well, I ain't askin' you to do the shootin'. I'll attend to that part of the contract. All I want you to do is to let me know which is the right man. They'll likely to be some few passing along the coach-road, and as I don't know the joker you've got ter be on hand to point out which it is."

It was a momentous question for Harvey. He felt as if he could not take another man's life, even if it meant recovering his money, but the remembrance of that other young fellow lying weltering in his blood, stricken down, as he was convinced he had been, by the very man who had robbed him, decided Harvey to accept his host's offer.

"Now, what's it to be?" the stranger asked. "Are you goin' to be my pard or not?"

"I'll go with you, but there's to be no killing if it is possible to avoid it. Get the money and securities, and either let the fellow go, or carry him back to Sotillo as the murderer of his companion."

"Any way you wish!" laughed the other; "but if we wanter catch him we oughter be movin' before long. Just turn in an' git some sleep, an' I'll call you's soon as it's time."

To this Harvey had no objection, worn out as he was. He was asleep almost as soon as he lay down. It seemed to him that he had only just closed his eyes when his companion woke him and supplied him with some more hot tea and smoked meat.

"Get outside that, an' I'll fetch the hoss," he said as he walked off, to reappear shortly, leading a fine American horse by the bridle.

As soon as Harvey had finished his hasty meal the fire was raked out and they started down the hill at a smart pace, the youth riding the horse, as he was still stiff and sore from his long and exhausting run.

The dawn was just breaking when they reached the coach-road which runs between Sotillo and Dodge City. They came out on the road some five miles from Sotillo, and the stranger made a careful examination of the surface.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed as he rejoined Harvey. "No one ain't passed this way for five or six hours, I'll swear. If your man has gone off he didn't take this road. It's only a gamble, anyway, that he'll come at all. Still, it's worth the waitin', an' one place is as good as another for a rest off."

They were well concealed from the sight of anyone approaching, having taken up a position on the top of a well-wooded bank, from which they could see the road for nearly half a mile.

Now that Harvey could see his companion better he was not at all taken with his looks. The man was plainly a villain, and a certain furtive look in his eyes, which never rested for long on any one place, gave him the appearance of a hunted animal. He was well armed, too, and now that the

youth's blood had cooled and his brain cleared he began to wish that he had had nothing to do with him. All the arguments against this way of recovering his property came back with redoubled force, and he determined to draw back. But then he thought that the intended victim should be warned.

"Don't you think it would be better if I went down to that bend there and signalled you if I saw him coming?" he suggested to his companion. "Others may be with him, which will make it dangerous for us to attack."

The man looked at him for a moment through half-closed eyes.

"Reckon you'd best stay where you are," he growled. "We kin see all we want to fr'm here."

There was silence for a minute.

"Reckon you're right, after all," said the man suddenly. "You git down to where you kin see that patch of yaller grass, and hide in the trees. If he's comin' alone hold up one hand; if more are with him h'ist 'em both. Lively now!"

Glad that his plan had been so quickly agreed to, Harvey slipped away and gained the place. The Sotilla road was now open to his view for nearly a mile, and as he looked he saw a rider just come into view. He slipped back among the trees and, once out of sight of his desperado "pard," walked towards the rider.

It seemed an eternity to Harvey before the man came near enough to be recognised, and his heart beat fast as he saw that it was indeed the one who had been at "Salter House."

At sight of his face all thoughts of saving him were overpowered by the loathing he felt. At that moment if he had had a gun he would have shot the man dead. But his better nature prevailed, and he fought back the feeling as the rider came almost opposite his hiding-place.

"Hallo!" Harvey called.

The man started, and his revolver was instantly turned towards the youth.

"Don't shoot!" cried the latter. "They're waiting for you up the road. Ride back if you value your life!"

The man, who had seemed to be on the point of spurring away, pulled up sharply.

"Don't wait!" reiterated Harvey. "You will be killed as sure as——"

"Fate!" cried a mocking voice behind the lad as the report of a revolver fired close to his head nearly deafened him.

To his horror he saw the man he had meant to save reel in his saddle and fall heavily to the ground, whilst the startled horse bolted up the road.

Hardly knowing what he did, Harvey rushed forward to help him, when he felt his arm gripped and a revolver pressed against his temple.

"You young traitor!" growled the stranger as he faced him. "I guessed you was up to some such game. So you would have warned him, would you, and left me in the lurch? Is that your friend?"

"He was no friend of mine," said Harvey; "but I did not wish to have him killed through my fault."

"You didn't, eh? Waal, I reckon he's dead, anyway. Now, go search him and see if the papers is there."

Harvey would have refused, but the murderous glitter in the man's eyes warned him that he would stand no refusal. He walked to where the dead man lay, and with trembling hands unbuttoned his coat and drew out several bulky packets. His companion seized them eagerly.

"Yes, that's a pretty tidy sum, and don't you make any mistake!" he chuckled. "Ef you'd 'a' bin sensible you'd 've come in fer your share, but as it is, you——"

He stopped suddenly and glanced down the road. Harvey turned to see what had alarmed him.

Two men were riding at full speed towards them, the soft sand having deadened the sound of their approach until this moment. They were within gunshot, and the foremost fired as the youth sprang up, determined to hold his outlaw "pard" if possible until the newcomers could effect his capture.

But a cry of dismay broke from him as he saw the fellow just disappearing among the trees.

Harvey started to run, hoping to catch him before he could reach the

horse, when the oncoming riders yelled to him to stand and a shot passed close by his head.

The youth threw up his hands and turned to face his pursuers. Then, with a cry of surprise and pleasure, he ran forward.

The first horseman was Buffalo Bill!

The scout pulled up within a yard of him, and Harvey recoiled at the sternness of his looks.

"So this is the real truth of your story, is it?" asked Buffalo Bill. "Ted Oren was wrong, then, and you gulled him as you succeeded in gulling us. Tie him up, Joe," he added as California Joe came up. "We must get after the other one. Who was he?"

He fixed his eyes on Harvey as he asked the question.

"That I can't tell you," answered the lad miserably. "He was quite a stranger to me; I only met him last night.

"What! more lies? You know well enough he was Bull-Head, and you're his pard. But it's no use wasting time with you here. We'll talk later. Is that man dead, Joe?"

Joe was kneeling by the dead man.

"Yes, dead as mutton, Bill. Shot through the heart."

"Do you know him?"

"Waal, I've seen him in Dodge City, but I cain't call to mind his handle."

"Well, just carry him to the side of the road, and don't lose sight of this 'hold-up.'"

"I swear I had nothing to do with the murder!" Harvey cried. "I came down to warn him, and the other——"

But Cody cut him short with an exclamation of disgust, and, turning his horse, dashed away up the road.

Harvey would have tried to clear himself with California Joe, but the latter shut him up directly, refusing to listen to a word.

Three minutes later Buffalo Bill galloped back. He was leading the dead man's horse, which he had found a short distance round the bend.

"Bull-Head's ridden off, Joe!" he cried. "We must get after him at once. We can't leave this fellow here. Make him mount this animal, and tie him on. It's all we can do."

Now, this course was just what Harvey wanted, and he was not long in mounting, though it cut him to the quick when California Joe secured his feet under the horse's body. Then, following Buffalo Bill, they galloped to the place where Bull-Head, as the scout had named him, had lain in ambush. The outlaw's trail was pretty plain.

Harvey was as keenly alert to catch sight of the fugitive as either of his companions. But they had a cunning villain to deal with, one who was up to every device to throw a pursuer off his track. He had a good start, too, which he had made the most of. But he had two of the cleverest trailers in the world to buck against, and they followed every twist and turn with unfailing accuracy, until they found themselves at midday far up in the hills.

The horses were showing the effects of the hard work, and Harvey's mount in particular, not being so seasoned as the others, could hardly be induced to move.

The scouts dismounted, and Buffalo Bill was seriously perplexed as to what was best to be done.

"We can't rest off yet," he said to Joe. "Every minute is of value now, and any delay may lose us the chance of catching our man."

"Leave this young rip here, then, Bill. He can't get away, and we can call for him on our way back."

"That's all we can do, I'm afraid," said Buffalo Bill. "Untie his feet and put him in that recess in the rocks there. He'll be safe enough, and if you hopple the horse it won't stray far from that patch of grass."

Joe untied Harvey's feet and, ordering him to dismount, led him to the place Buffalo Bill had indicated, where he made him lie down and securely tied his ankles again. He examined the thongs round his wrists, satisfied himself that they were secure, and then proceeded to hopple the horse.

Harvey would have made another effort to prove his innocence, but he felt that it would be utterly futile to do so. Appearances, as they had been all along in this fatal business, were dead against him, and not one

man in a thousand would have believed him. He remained silent therefore as Joe carried through his task, and watched in hopeless misery as the scouts remounted and went at a hand-gallop up the mountain pass.

CHAPTER 6.

A Close Call for Joe

"Look out, Joe! We're right on him!"

Buffalo Bill pulled up sharply, staring at a form moving through the trees some little distance ahead. California Joe joined him.

"It's the hoss, right enough, Bill. But I'm blest if I kin see the rider!"

Both men instinctively grasped their guns, prepared to shoot at a moment's notice.

"The animal is wandering free, Joe. The slippery rascal has given us the go-by again, and we've been tracking his bronc while he has been putting a few miles between us in another direction."

They stared blankly at each other, and then rode forward until they reached the horse. It was covered with lather, its knees trembled so that it could scarcely stand, its head drooping towards the ground as if there were not sufficient strength left to support its weight.

The poor brute had been ridden right out, and from the marks on its knees and side had evidently fallen.

"He's not left the animal very long, Joe. It must have been before we reached this belt of pine, or we should have noticed his trail. We must try back a bit. He probably made off near the cliffs back yonder, and, as likely as not, was watching us pass below him."

The scouts returned to the steep and rocky part they had just ridden across. The trail had led them so far, and they had come on for the simple reason that the outlaw could not have gone any other way without leaving his horse.

The ground gave little indication of the animal's passage, but the trail had become plain enough directly they reached the wood, only to end in this disappointment.

"We may as well quit right off, Cody," Joe growled as he looked at the uncompromising surface of the ground and up the almost unscalable rocks above them. "Injun Lee's scored another point, I reckon. It'd be only the merest luck that would put us on his trail now."

"And luck often plays a very big part in a game of this sort, Joe. He can't have gone far. The state of the horse shows that he rode almost as far as this. He would not have risked climbing far up there with us so close behind him, for fear of being seen. A million to one he's watching us now. Come back to the pine-woods, and we'll watch the cliffs a bit. He'll be able to see us if he's up there, so just cast about as if searching for his trail, and keep the tail of your eye on the up-grade."

The scouts carried out this plan successfully, working up and down the slopes, but getting occasional peeps at the hill above them through the trees, and Joe at last spotted the man's head.

He moved nearer Buffalo Bill.

"He's up there, sure enough, Bill —close to that spur of red granite."

"I know where you mean," answered the scout, without looking. "Now we'll just play the game up and ride off. He won't stir from there for some little time. We must make him think we have given up hope of finding him and are going back. Best take his horse with us to help the idea a bit. He'll know we shouldn't take it unless we were going home."

"An' what'll we do after?"

"Wait until we have got round the shoulder of the hill. You can take the horses down among the shadow of the pines and get back under cover of the rocks, and I will try to get above Bull-Head so that he will be between two fires."

"It might work, Bill," said the Californian doubtfully. "Anyway, I don't know how else we's goin' ter nail him, so we may's well go ahead."

A glance had shown Buffalo Bill that Indian Lee was still watching them. He felt tempted to try a shot at him, but the distance was too great.

They moved out of the pine-woods

slowly, mounted again—Joe leading the robber's horse—and went off down the hill.

The moment Buffalo Bill knew he was out of sight he slipped to the ground, after passing his reins to Joe, who rode on to gain the pine-woods.

Up the steep side of the hills Cody climbed, bearing always a little to the right, so that there should be less risk of being seen too soon by Indian Lee, supposing the man should have left his position.

At last the scout attained a point which he judged must be well above the man's hiding-place.

Sure enough, he saw Bull-Head some distance below, climbing downwards. The robber passed out of sight the next instant. He was making directly for the place where California Joe should be waiting. Buffalo Bill started to follow.

Ten minutes later he had sight of him again, but he caught his breath as he saw what Indian Lee was doing.

The man was lying at full-length, looking over the edge of the cliff. His powerful hands poised a heavy lump of stone, ready to hurl it on someone below.

California Joe's life hung by a thread!

"Look out, Joe!"

Buffalo Bill's shout echoed through the mountains, and he fired at the same instant. But too late to prevent the fall of the rock. At best he had only hoped to disturb Indian Lee's aim.

The ponderous stone fell as he shouted, and with incredible speed Indian Lee, apparently unhurt by the bullet, sprang up and disappeared under the overhanging rocks.

With a heavy heart Buffalo Bill made his way down to where his fellow-scout was lying huddled up under the cliff. There was a terrible wound on his head, and his left arm was broken just below the shoulder.

The rock must have struck him partially on the shoulder and head. Had it struck him full on the head he must have been killed instantly. As it was, he still lived, though he was quite insensible.

Without waiting to bind up Joe's head Buffalo Bill raised him and carried him to the shelter of the pine-woods, expecting every minute to be shot by the desperado who was lurking on the hill above.

But the man must have been scared by the unexpected shot, or perhaps had been hit, after all, and was not in a state to continue the struggle. Anyway, the scout reached the pines in safety. He laid his companion down and bound up his head; then discovered where the horses had been left, laid the wounded man across the saddle, and started down the hill.

Buffalo Bill remembered Harvey, and directed his course so as to get to him. At any rate, they had captured Lee's confederate, though Cody believed the lad was only a cat's-paw. Still, it would not do to let him get free again. He would carry him down to the town, and then start out to hunt Lee to his death.

But the scout's troubles were not over. He was walking by the side of Joe's horse, guiding it over the easiest ground, driving the two other animals ahead, when a couple of brown bears came lumbering round the corner of the cliff and stopped short within a yard or two of the two leading horses.

Snorting with fear the startled animals wheeled round and dashed back up the path at full speed. Joe's horse tried to follow suit, and reared straight up on end.

Buffalo Bill just gripped hold of Joe's senseless form in time to save him from being hurled to the ground, and the horse dashed round and careered after the other two.

The two bears, every bit as startled, wheeled round and made off in the direction from which they had come.

Fortunately, the scout was at no great distance from where Harvey had been left. He took his wounded friend on his back and carried him there, not without difficulty.

Harvey was lying as they had left him, and was distressed beyond measure to see the state Joe was in.

"Have you had an accident?" he asked as Buffalo Bill laid Joe down and proceeded to bind up his wound.

"Yes; the same sort of accident as

happened to that poor fellow you killed this morning. Your friend Bull-Head, or Indian Lee, has done his best to kill Joe, too."

"It is useless for me to try to make you believe anything but the worst of me," Harvey answered bitterly. "But if I could help you now I would gladly do anything you ask."

"You can do nothing," Buffalo Bill said shortly. "You and your pard have done enough between you, and the sooner I get you down to the town the better. If my friend should recover consciousness tell him I have gone after the horses, which have just stampeded. I don't think they will have run far."

He left the place, and Harvey turned his head so that he could see the wounded man. It was hard to believe that the poor fellow was alive. His face, streaked with blood, looked like death, and Harvey could not even see that he breathed.

But a few minutes later he saw the eyelids quiver, a deep sigh came through the parted lips, and California Joe opened his eyes.

"Where is I, pard? What's happened?" he gasped, in a voice not more than a whisper.

"You've been hurt somehow, and your friend has left you here whilst he goes after the horses."

At the sound of the strange voice Joe turned his head and saw Harvey lying near him. He tried to get up, but sank back again.

"Hurt, eh? Yes, I reckon I is. I feel sorter smashed to pieces. There ain't no water handy, is there?"

"If there were I couldn't give you any. You made too sure of your knots for that."

"Yes, I remember now. You're Bull-Head's pard, ain't you?"

"No, and never was. It's all a ghastly mistake, with every appearance against me. I never set eyes on him until last night, and I swear I was trying to save that man, though he was a thief and a murderer himself, when Bull-Head shot him and forced me to take my own papers from him."

"Your own papers? What do you mean?"

Harvey rapidly told the story of his visit to Sotillo and its result.

"An' Bull-Head has them papers now?" asked Joe.

"Yes, if he has not destroyed them, which is scarcely likely. There seems to be a curse on them. My father no doubt was killed by the man who worked up the plot, who, I believe, was the same man Bull-Head shot this morning. If I am taken to Sotillo under the charge of aiding him, you know what my fate will be, for I have nothing but my word to prove my innocence."

At that instant the youth gazed out of the recess and caught sight of a figure stealing towards the hoppled horse—the figure of Bull-Head!

Harvey's heart beat like a sledge-hammer.

"Joe," he whispered, "can you shoot, or are you too weak? Bull-Head is about to steal the one horse left here."

"Then I cannot stop him," answered Joe in a faint whisper. "I can sca'cely lift a hand."

"But say, Joe, couldn't you manage to cut my hands free? I could take one of your revolvers——"

"And finish me off and join your friend, eh?"

"Well, it's our only chance, Joe," whispered Harvey despairingly. "He's up to the horse, and is removing the hopples."

Joe's hand crept to his knife.

"I may be mad ter do it," he whispered, "but I'll chance it."

With an effort he drew the weapon, managed to stretch his arm out, and the keen edge cut through the thongs round Harvey's arms.

The lad, without a word, but keeping his eyes fixed on Bull-Head, reached over and drew Joe's revolver.

At that moment Bull-Head turned towards them. He was leading the horse, and looking keenly about him on all sides.

Harvey raised the revolver and fired. But, alas, the bullet missed!

Quick as lightning Bull-Head drew and returned the shot, and the youth felt a sharp pain in his left arm, but fired again just as the outlaw sprang behind the horse.

The shot struck the animal in the head, dropping it dead, but before Harvey could shoot a third time the robber's next bullet struck the revolver from his grasp.

Livid with rage the ruffian sprang forward to finish his work, when a shot rang out from the woods. Bull-Head dropped, but it was only a ruse. The bullet had torn through his coat without injuring him.

In a moment he had crawled up behind California Joe, and, propping the wounded man up against his knee, waited for Buffalo Bill.

"Ef you so much as move a finger," he said to Harvey, "I'll put a bullet through your brain! Guess this carrion's too knocked erbout ter be dangerous."

He shifted the wounded Joe, who had, as a matter of fact, fainted away directly he was lifted, so that the scout's body entirely protected the bandit.

Three or four minutes had passed when Buffalo Bill's voice rang out from the wood.

"You'd best quit this foolishness, Lee!" he called. "I've got you lined up, and you can't escape!"

"Shoot erway, then, Cody!" answered the robber, with a burst of savage laughter. "Reckon he ain't dead yet, an' your bullet 'll just finish the business."

There was no answer to his taunt. Buffalo Bill must have realised the position before he spoke, but he had tried to bluff the enemy.

"Now I'll tell you what I'll do," went on Bull-Head. "I'm willin' ter exchange. You stan' back an' let me git off, an' I won't touch Joe. Refuse, an' I'll blow his roof off and kill this kid, too! I'll give you while I count twenty to decide!"

Slowly the numbers rang out, but Buffalo Bill called before ten had been counted.

"I agree!" he shouted.

"I thought you would!" chuckled the ruffian. "Most men 'd make you stand out and throw down your guns; but I've met you before, Buffler, and I'm willin' ter take yer word."

He laid Joe down and rose up, thrusting his revolver ostentatiously in his belt. Then he turned to Harvey Linnell.

"That's twice you've tried ter best me, you young hound!" he growled. "If ever you cross my path again look out for yourself! I shan't fergit!"

"I shall follow you," said Harvey quietly, "as sure as my name is Harvey Linnell!"

"Harvey what?" cried Bull-Head, starting forward, whilst a momentary look of terror passed over his face.

"Linnell," repeated Harvey slowly, fixing his eyes on the man's blanched cheeks—"Harvey Linnell, son of Scott Linnell!"

Bull-Head staggered as if he had been struck, and, without a word, he turned and ran swiftly across the open space, plunged amongst the trees, and disappeared.

For two minutes Harvey lay there, staring towards the woods, as if expecting to see him again. Something told him as plainly as if in words that he had found his father's murderer.

"And I let him go!" he groaned, starting up.

Joe's knife lay close by, and the lad cut the thongs from his ankles. His left arm pained him, but it was not broken. His right hand still felt numbed from the jar of the bullet which had struck the revolver from his hand.

He stooped down and drew the other revolver from Joe's belt. It was fully loaded, and he started at a run to follow Bull-Head, when the bushes parted and Buffalo Bill appeared with his gun levelled.

"No, you don't!" cried the scout. "My promise did not apply to Bull-Head's pard. Throw down that gun!"

"How long is this miserable mistake to keep on?" cried the lad as he allowed the weapon to fall and covered his face to hide the tears of rage and mortification which he could not keep back.

"Just as long as it will take you to prove that it is a mistake," answered Buffalo Bill sternly. "If I hadn't arrived when I did, you would both have got off scot-free, but I fancied I had come in time to prevent him from cutting you loose. Now, right-about, and let me see what has happened to Joe.

If any injury has been done, I'll shoot you myself!"

He drove Harvey before him until they stood by Joe again.

The Californian scout was lying as if dead, but a quick examination proved that he still lived.

Buffalo Bill knelt down, flask in hand, and moistened his lips with some whisky, forcing a few drops between the closed teeth.

The spirit took effect almost at once. California Joe opened his eyes, and a smile crossed his rugged face as he saw the scout.

"Howdy, pard?" he whispered. "We all ain't petered out yet, then?"

"Not this time, Joe. I got back with the horses just as you and Bull-Head fired at each other. I fired, too, but the trees spoilt my aim."

"I never did no shootin' at all, Bill. I couldn't have raised my hand, let alone my gun. It was the kid as plugged him, or tried to."

"Who?" cried the bewildered scout.

"The kid we had tied up there. I took chances with him, an' just managed to cut his arms free. He grabbed my gun an' fired just as the feller wuz making off with the hoss. He missed him, but the next shot killed the hoss, an' then Injun Lee knocked his gun out of his hand. Your comin' made Bull-Head levant in a hurry."

"Then you're not pards, after all!" cried Buffalo Bill, turning towards Harvey, when he uttered a cry and dashed out into the open.

Harvey had slipped away as the two friends were talking, and though the scout hunted about he could not discover a trace of him.

CHAPTER 7.

Bull-Head Run to Earth—Harvey Cleared at Last

The town of Sotillo was in a state of great excitement. Some men driving out from Dodge City had found the body of a man lying by the roadside, a bullet wound showing how he had died.

They had brought the body in, and it was recognised as that of a man named James Bentley, who had been staying at the "Salter House."

Later on a saloon-keeper from the lower part of the town identified him as the friend of a young fellow who had been stabbed by a stranger the night before. There had been a disturbance, as he stated, at his saloon, the room was cleared, and when it was re-entered the stranger was seen kneeling near the wounded youngster.

James Bentley had led the chase after the would-be murderer, who had succeeded in getting away. There was little doubt that Bentley had himself met his death by the same hand.

But while this affair was being discussed Buffalo Bill, supporting California Joe on another horse, rode into the town. He quickly identified the body as that of the man whom Bull-Head or his pard had shot, and his story produced a profound impression.

The saloon-keeper described Harvey Linnell as he had seen him, and the description tallied exactly with the youngster the scouts had caught in an apparent act of outlawry.

When it was known that Bull-Head and his pard were in the hills every able-bodied citizen was wild to go out, and the whole community resolved itself into a committee of vigilance.

There were numbers who knew the hills as well as they knew the town, and were capable of following any ordinary trail. Messengers were dispatched to Dodge City and the settlements over near the river to warn the inhabitants to look out for the murderers, and parties of men, mounted and on foot, started for the hills.

California Joe was put under the care of a surgeon, and Buffalo Bill placed himself at the sheriff's disposal for leading the chase after the redoubtable Indian Lee, or Bull-Head, as the citizens knew him.

All Cody's suspicions as to the part played by Harvey Linnell returned with redoubled force after the story the saloon-keeper had told.

The scout had seen the manager of the Sotillo bank, and the latter had laughed at the idea that the lad was Scott Linnell's son. The real son had been identified without any possible doubt by James Bentley and another man, both of whom he had known for

some time as respectable citizens of Dodge City. He would scarcely have paid over such a sum of money unless he had been so convinced.

Buffalo Bill and the sheriff, with a dozen men, rode well ahead of the rest of the force, directing the others to scatter along the base of the hills and work upward, so as to cut off Bull-Head's retreat should he try to get down to the plains.

The scene of the fight was at length reached, and Buffalo Bill followed Bull-Head's trail without difficulty for some distance.

The man had not attempted to hide his tracks in any way, having apparently rushed almost blindly through the woods.

But at last they were brought up by a wall of rock rising almost sheer from the forest, and it did not take long for the scout to see that the fugitive had actually scaled the cliff, though at first sight it looked an almost impossible task. He waited until the rest of the party came up.

"He's gone up here, Cloete," he said to the sheriff. "What other way is there up here?"

Cloete turned to Gan Potter, who knew the hills better than any of the party.

"There's a dozen up there," cried Gan; "but most of them would take a long time to reach. He's made the old b'ar lairs ef he's gone this-away, and we'll have our work cut out ter git at him."

"Where are they?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Almost straight above us. There's an ol' b'ar track leads down to them from the top of the hill; but it's a mighty long distance away, and one man c'u'd stop a hundred on it."

"Then this is the best way up?"

"Shoo! you'd be mad to try it. He'd jest have ter drop a stone, and you'd be knocked off. A fly couldn't scarcely walk up it."

"All the same, I'm going to try it. You boys can go round by different paths so's to keep him there."

Cloete and Gan both refused. If Buffalo Bill was going they would go, too. The others must go off as proposed, in case Bull-Head had continued his flight and not stayed at the bear caves.

It was a stiff climb, the first part especially, but higher up the rock was more rugged and gave better footholds.

At last Gan called to Buffalo Bill to stop as they reached a small ledge running along the face of the cliff.

"This is the path," he said, "though it don't look very promising. He's gone along it right enough. See that, where he scraped the stones away down there? Reckon Bull-Head came nigh slippin' then and breakin' his neck."

"Where are the caves you told me of?" asked Cody.

"A good bit roun' the shoulder there. You kin see what chance a man'd have if friend Bull-Head was—— Thunder! look there!"

Even Buffalo Bill was startled as the well-known face of Harvey Linnell appeared round the bend. The lad was coming along the dizzy path, but pulled up the instant he saw the three men.

Cloete's gun went up, but the scout gripped his arm.

"Don't shoot!" he said. "We must take him alive if possible."

At Cloete's action Harvey drew back swiftly out of sight.

"He's gone to warn the other," said Buffalo Bill. "We shall never be able to pass that corner now. The other end of the path must be stopped."

He looked upwards, and noted that it was possible to climb to the summit of the cliff further back.

"You stay here, Gan; and if they try to get past, kill them. The sheriff and I must make for the other end, and they will be caught between two fires. Then, if they don't surrender, we must finish the matter."

Gan nodded, and lay down with his rifle pointed directly towards the bend in the path.

Buffalo Bill and the sheriff, moving back along the ledge until they found a place where an ascent was possible, started to climb.

"Stiff work, Cloete," laughed the scout as at last he reached the top and turned to assist the sheriff. "Now,

if I only knew where the head of that path was we might take a short cut to it."

"We can only cut off this corner, I'm afraid," answered the sheriff. "The head of the path, if I remember, comes out round the other side of that spur, just where the pines are growin'."

They started to run until they again had to approach the edge of the precipice.

Buffalo Bill leant over and saw the pathway scarcely fifty feet below; but the face of the rock here was absolutely smooth for quite half that distance.

"See here, Cloete, I'm going to change the programme again. You can go on to the head of the path, and I'm going down here."

The sheriff stared aghast.

"It's all right," the scout laughed as he unwound his lariat and ran towards several gaunt-looking pines which stood near the precipice. "I can get down easily enough and steal a march upon them. There!" He fixed the line and looked over before dropping it. "Now, you get on as fast as you like."

The sheriff didn't seem to like the plan.

"I'll wait, anyway, until you git down, Cody, or they'll be plugging you as you swing."

"No, you don't. Get on at once, and stop the trap, or they'll slip through our fingers again."

There was no use trying to go against the scout once he had made up his mind, and, recognising the importance of heading the pair off, Cleote started at a run and was soon lost to view.

Buffalo Bill, after loosening his gun, looked over the cliff once more. The pathway was clear, and he swung himself over, slipping down the lariat like a streak, and was soon standing in safety on the path.

There was one thing he had omitted to ask Cloete, and that was a most important thing: On which side did the caves lie? Were they nearer Gan or towards the head of the path?

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The fact that there were several footmarks about told him nothing. They pointed both ways in the soft dust which had accumulated on the ledge.

He decided to try towards the head of the pass first, as Gan would look after anyone trying to escape in the other direction, and Cloete would not reach his place for some little time.

On passing round the next bend Cody saw the place which Gan had described, a series of four or five openings in the cliff.

The one nearest to him was the largest, and here no doubt the two fugitives were hiding. He wondered a good deal that, so far as he could see, neither was on guard.

They must have expected an attack from this direction, yet there was certainly no one there, and he could only surmise that they had fled along the pathway at the first alarm, unless they were lurking further inside the cave, ready to shoot.

This hardly seemed likely, but it was useless to wait.

Buffalo Bill drew his revolver and crept along the widening path until he had almost reached the first opening. It was only a narrow-looking cleft, running back some distance into the cliff. The prints of feet were distinctly visible in the soft sand at the mouth.

It seemed foolhardy to venture in, but the scout had made up his mind to capture Indian Lee, and never hesitated as to what he should do. He advanced to the opening, and was just about to enter when he heard the rattle of stones falling down the cliff, turned, and saw Harvey Linnell coming fast towards him.

The youth laid his finger on his lips, and by his actions seemed to beg the scout to come to him without noise.

He was quite unarmed, and, thinking it would be better to secure him first before tackling his more formidable partner, Buffalo Bill went towards him.

"Keep still!" he said as he neared the lad. "Don't drop your arms now, or you'll go down the cliff!"

Harvey, who looked wretchedly weak and ill, smiled sadly, as if such a fate would not be so dreadful.

"I have been waiting for you, and hoping you would come," he said as Cody reached him. "I followed Bull-Head to this place; but, being unarmed, could do nothing."

"Where is he?" asked the scout.

"He is—or was—in the cave there I followed him so far, and then went back to wait for you, hoping that you would follow the trail in time to catch him. I hardly think he has gone."

"So, seeing the game is up, you are willing to betray your pard, are you?"

Buffalo Bill asked the question with a tone of disgust he did not attempt to disguise.

"Think what you like of me," answered Linnell. "Kill me if you like, but kill that demon, too! He murdered my father!"

"Did what?" asked the scout. "Do you still keep up that yarn that you are Scott Linnell's son?"

"It is the simple truth, Mr. Cody, as you will learn later, whatever happens to me. The man admitted that he killed my father, whose fortune he now carries in his pockets."

"Say, rather, the fortune belonging to that young fellow you stabbed in the saloon at Sotillo," said the scout, forcing himself to speak roughly. "But enough of this!" he added. "Stay here until I return. All paths are guarded by the Vigilantes, and you cannot get away."

Knowing that the lad was unarmed he did not fear any attack from him, and moved away towards the cave again.

Had he only known it, the delay in speaking to Harvey robbed him of a chance of capturing Bull-Head without trouble, and nearly proved fatal to him and the youngster, too.

The desperado, worn out with fatigue, and perhaps thinking he had succeeded in throwing off his enemies, had fallen asleep almost as soon as he reached the shelter of the caves, which had served him for a hiding-place for a considerable time. But, like most men of his calling, he slept with his ears open, and though the sound of the talking had not reached him so far,

what was to follow roused him all too quickly.

Buffalo Bill had got nearly to the cave again when he turned for a moment to look at Harvey, and was startled to see that the lad was close behind him.

Convinced that he was meditating some mischief, the scout was about to order him back when his hand, resting against the rock, detached a piece of stone, which clattered down to the path.

The next moment Harvey uttered a cry and sprang towards him.

Buffalo Bill turned again to see Bull-Head's revolver pointing directly at him.

Both fired at the same moment. The outlaw staggered back out of sight, and the scout heard a deep groan behind him. He turned just in time to clutch hold of Harvey and save him from falling over the precipice.

The lad sank on his knees, the blood pouring from a wound at the side of his head.

"Don't mind me, Mr. Cody!" he gasped. "Look out!"

Buffalo Bill faced round towards the cave again, but too late, as t seemed, for a bullet struck his pistol-arm, and his weapon fell from his nerveless fingers. He tried to draw his other gun, but Bull-Head, evidently badly wounded, again raised his revolver, aiming deliberately at the scout's heart, when, just before he fired, Harvey, who had seized the scout's fallen pistol, sent a bullet through the desperado's brain.

Bull-Head's revolver exploded, but the bullet passed harmlessly overhead, and the outlaw, pitching forward, went headlong over the precipice.

Buffalo Bill, after a moment's pause, turned to Harvey, but the lad had fainted. He managed to drag him along the pathway to the cave, and contrived somehow to bind up the wounded head.

As he was trying to do the same with his own shattered arm he heard a shout, and Cloete dashed up to the cave, a revolver in each hand.

"Thank Heaven you're alive, Cody!" he cried. "I got down to the path, and heard the firing as I was coming to help you. Have you caught them both?"

"Bull-Head went over the cliff with a bullet through his brain, Cloete, shot by Harvey Linnell here, who saved my life."

The sheriff stared at the scout as if he thought he had gone crazy.

"It's a fact, sheriff. Help me to bandage my arm and fix the lad's head too, and then go and call the other boys. We must get the youngster away as soon as possible, and collect what's worth the taking from that villain's body."

The sheriff was too astonished to do more than ejaculate, "Waal, waal, I want to know!" several times; but he performed his part well and expeditiously before running off to get assistance.

In due time others of the party arrived on the scene. Harvey was carried up the path to the top of the cliff, where a rude litter was quickly made and the still insensible lad carried down to the lower ground.

Indian Lee's body was found, all the papers he had got from Bentley were taken from the pockets, and, leaving the mangled remains for the coyotes, the party moved away to meet their friends. Having met them and explained what had happened, the whole force set out for Sotillo.

It is needless to say their arrival at that place with Harvey Linnell created a sensation. The youth had recovered sufficiently to talk, and soon convinced Buffalo Bill and all those interested as to the truth of his statements.

Several of his father's letters, which he had sent to "Mr. Broadbent," were found in Bentley's room, and Harvey soon showed by his knowledge of their contents that he was the real son of Scott Linnell.

Later on all doubt—if any did exist—was settled by the confession of the young fellow who had been stabbed. For the latter recovered, and owned up to the whole business.

Bentley had known Scott Linnell and was acquainted with all his affairs. Linnell had been murdered and robbed by Bull-Head, and Bentley, on hearing

of it, had determined to get hold of the money which he knew was deposited in the bank.

To do this it was necessary to prove his right, and he thought of the scheme which had wrought so much evil to Harvey. He had hired a room in the Adams Block for a few days, placing young Fletcher, as the boy was called, in charge. Then he had written to Harvey, received the photo and the letters, and arranged to have him drugged and robbed.

Fletcher's photograph was substituted for Harvey's. Fletcher himself was coached in what he was to say and do, stipulating that he was to receive a third of the money.

This Bentley had paid him on his delivering up all the letters he had used to help in the fraud, and Bentley had then taken him off to different saloons, robbed him when he thought he was intoxicated, and stabbed him when he attempted to resist.

Bentley had then started a row in the saloon to cover the deed and make good his own escape, and it was, of course, Harvey's persistent bad luck which had brought him into that part of the affair.

Everything having been cleared up satisfactorily it only remained for Harvey to get well, which, thanks to careful nursing, he managed to do, though it was weeks before he was about again, a deep scar along the side of his face and head showing how narrowly he had escaped death. He and California Joe were nursed back to health in the same room, and became fast friends, whilst Buffalo Bill's fine constitution enabled him to recover quickly from his own wound.

The famous scout marvelled to himself how, notwithstanding the black appearance of things against Harvey Linnell, he could ever have doubted the lad's integrity as he had done.

Generally, his—Buffalo Bill's—first reading of a person's character was infallibly correct, but he had undoubtedly been at grievous fault in the present instance.

However, everything had ended well, as it happened, and Buffalo Bill satisfied his conscience by frankly apologising to the young man for having entertained suspicions of him.

But the scout seemed never able to make up sufficiently to Harvey all the pain and suffering he had caused him, and often remarked that the lad ought to have shot him as well as Indian Lee, better known amongst the good folks of Sotillo as Bull-Head the desperado.

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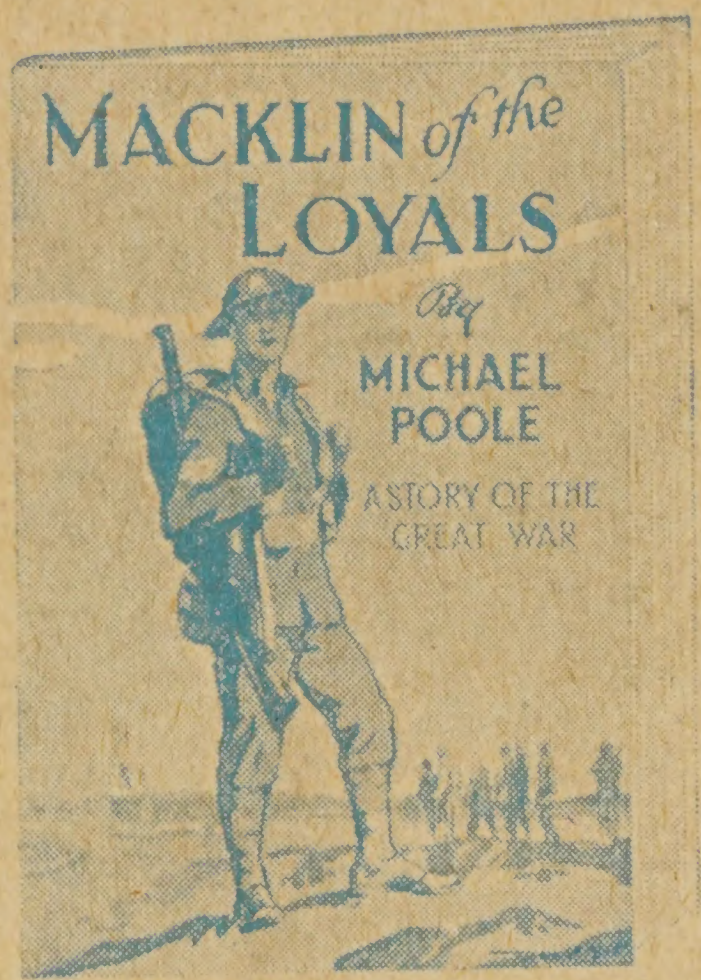

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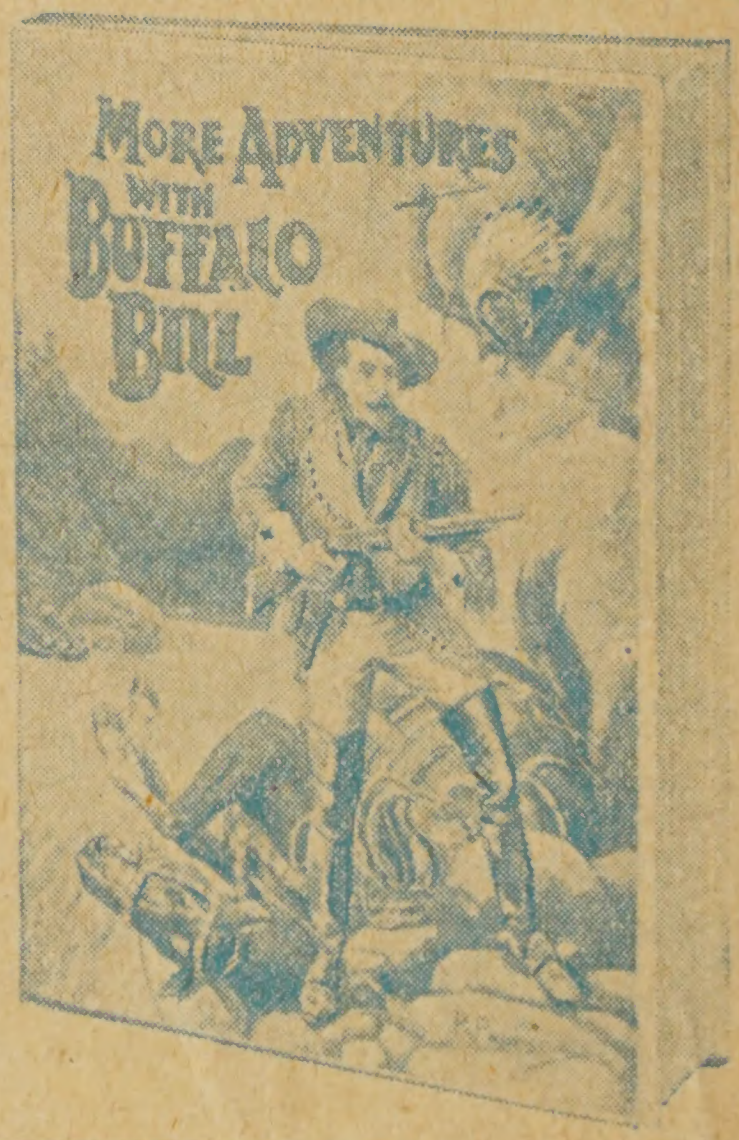

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